



*Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies  
The Montana Coalition*

*Bette Hall-Munger  
Executive Director*

EXHIBIT 8  
DATE 1-29-07  
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**Good Morning. Madam Chair, members of the committee. My name is Bette Hall-Munger. I am the Executive Director of Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies, a non-profit agency based in Helena. Our mission is to promote the safety, health and well-being of Montana's children, families and communities.**

**Our agency manages and provides technical support to a variety of public and privately-funded programs that are community-based, and child-focused. Presently, we are managing the Montana Safe Kids, Safe Communities Program with child passenger safety being the focus; Safe Routes to School that promotes healthy choices in walking and bicycling safely to school; Safe Sleep for Babies, a SIDS prevention program; the Children's Trust Fund Program, focusing on child abuse and neglect prevention; and we annually promote the CHIP back-to-school statewide campaign to continue advocating for children's access to quality health care.**

**Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies is a member of the Montana Council for Maternal Child Health (MCMCH). Each fall before the beginning of a legislative session, we partner with MCMCH to develop Montana's Children's Legislative Agenda. I had the privilege during November and December to travel across Montana, visiting 17 communities and talking to over 500 citizens about their concerns for the safety, health and well-being of children and families in their localities.**

**I am here today to state that Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies supports the Child and Family Services Division's budget request. Now is the time to fully fund the division's request for adequate resources – both in terms of dollars and human resources – to continue their important work to protect our most vulnerable children and youth from abuse, neglect and abandonment. And, we all know why.....**

**In my travels, many child and family issues were discussed around the tables. Issues ranging from CHIP expansion, lack of dental care, the primary seat belt law, all-day kindergarten, suicide prevention, improving public health statutes, teen pregnancy, among others; and, what turned out to be a reoccurring theme was social services or the lack thereof. In almost every community we visited, the topic came back to protecting our children from abuse and/or neglect. Community leaders, health care professionals, educators, legislators and others are concerned about social worker burnout, lack of social workers, increasing case loads, the enormity of the seriousness of these cases due to drug abuse – especially meth – lack**



Projects of Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies, The Montana Coalition



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& families

of treatment for parents, lack of transportation, and the critical issues facing foster parents who step up to the plate knowing full well that the children are more damaged and difficult to care for. I must say, I came away from most of the forums shaking my head.

The division is working harder than ever to improve its services, to work with families in more creative ways to keep parents and children together, to maintain best practices and follow policy, while complying with more and more federal regulations and unfunded mandates. This all takes time, money, talent, commitment, and perseverance. This budget is not out of line – especially in the request for more FTE. It's time that Montanans truly see the hard work that is being done in Helena and in the field to protect those who are so much more unfortunate than you and me. This is the need that communities are crying for – more human resources and the money to aid the system.

Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies wants to continue our mission and advocacy. We support this budget. Our agency also looks forward to a day when more prevention services are available to families who are on the brink. We look forward to a day when child protective services and expanded prevention services walk hand in hand supporting families without fear that one budget may be cut to help finance the other.

Now is the hour. We support this budget and know that you will do the right thing for Montana's most vulnerable children and at-risk families.

Thank you.